

The Invisible

Their howls and yips travel the half-mile
over the black field and into the house.
The invisible is calling. Those wild lives

so seldom considered are carrying on
without us, who like to believe that our eyes
have grasped it all. But what about

the matted fur, the bared teeth?
What about the chase that has already begun?
The deer slipping between trees

in the moonless woods. That darkness.
Who among us has seen even a common thing,
an owl, with our own eyes?

Planet Kepler 22B

They say they've found another
earth out there, greening like the shaded side
of a boulder.

I don't know which direction
of the night sky to face.
But that planet's there somewhere,
anywhere, despite me.

Despite everything that's turning here
with me. The sleeping
winter colony of ants,

the radio tower's red star
spilling the light of invisible mandolins,

the inner earth, our real
Milky Way, that glitters
with the minerals of ancestors,

the cave walls at Lascaux, where a herd
of red horses still circles in the darkness.

Brush and Ink Herd of Horses

Here is a man who has run
his hand along the neck of a horse
watched the streaming mane
gallop away

learned a poem of hoof beats
copied it down in bold
fluid strokes
on the unrolled sheet of rice paper

and with the horses he suffers
as his brush moves

the bit burning his mouth
the slicing whip against his thigh
the nails pounding
up through his bare feet

this is how he comes to love freedom

can you forgive my man's heart he cries
as he drives the horsehair brush
filled with ink
over the blinding tundra of paper

Emily's Dress

At the Dickinson Homestead

A replica, no body
ever moved in this
closed a bone button over a wrist

made the thousand ungrand gestures
of a life's unfolding

where is that something real
to lift by the shoulders
and fold again carefully
fabric dingy with a body's passage

seams still tight
with hand-stitched dashes

Window Watching at Midnight

Again the circle of green light.
My neighbor is sewing. With the two
natures of a moth, his hands
hover there, one futility
the other wing hope. And the fabric
is bunched up, from here
it's not clear what until a shirt
dangles its arm.

Other nights it's something
else, a square of cloth, a sock.
The work smaller and smaller till it appears
nothing's there, but the needle still moves
or what might be a needle, and what might
be thread is pulled, up and out.

Carving

He comes to understand
the spirit abiding in each scrap of wood
that passes through his hands.

Every child is born he says
knowing the language of trees—
for so long our unformed ear
is pressed to the wall of eternity.

With his hands he smoothes the wood
from which a face is beginning
to emerge.

Tools rest at his feet—
the blackened little knife,
a bent nail.

Tools

Hammer and hacksaw, vise and screwdriver have the hard gaze
and slow heartbeat of reptiles. I am visiting the hardware store

with my father. In a wooden drawer stained by dirty fingers
a sea of nails rolls back and forth. The bare light bulb

burning in the middle of the ceiling cuts deep shadows
in the men's faces, silent men that smell of sawdust and kerosene,

boiled cabbage and cigarettes. When I furtively pick up a crested little tool
its claws bite my palm. The neighborhood's only color TV glows neon

in the dark room behind the register. Cowboys are fighting at the bar,
chairs are crashing, the soundtrack builds ominously.

Saw

A boy is learning to cut wood—
in the sun the saw's shadow is the jaw
of an animal tearing the pine plank—
sawdust collects in the creases
of his untied shoes.

When he stops for a moment to size up
the line he's pulling through the soft
white wood
on the other side of the trees
a dog strains against its chain
and cries out.

Cuckoo Clock

The air is thick with minutes.
With years. Barehanded
we can't catch them, so we've armed ourselves
with clocks.

When my father opens
the hut-shaped box, the stream of time
freezes. He oils the gears
and sets the pendulum swinging.
Ghosts swim again like fishes.

It may announce the hour,
but there's so much more
that little bird's hiding.

I saw a hawk this morning
chased by crows,
something squirming in its grasp.

Rubber

Passing the tire factory on the way
to school I'd move through pockets of haunted air,
the sudden warmth of unseen hands would part
across my face, wrist bones of smoke twisting
away. This is my fate, I'd think, only half
hating it, how my life was caught up
in machinery I'd heard yet never seen,
that constant comforting whirl behind
painted-over windows. Across the street
in class I'd read about the honey-cured
flesh of pharaohs, the green glow that spilled
from the lab of Madame Curie, but still
nothing changed, even Giza and Paris
reeked with fumes of burning rubber.